

ARA/ECA
Gerald J. Whitman
(Drafting Office and Officer)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

12/14/79
AX 069
DATE: December 14, 1979
→ TBF

SUBJECT: U.S. Human Rights Report for Argentina

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Aja Espil; Acting Assistant Secretary
John Bushnell; Gerald J. Whitman (notetaker)

COPIES TO: ARA - Mr. Bushnell
ARA - Mr. Eaton
ARA/ECA - Mr. Ruser
AmEmbassy Buenos Aires ✓

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Ambassador Aja Espil began by saying that the Government of Argentina was very concerned about the State Department's human rights report for Argentina. The GOA attached great importance to the report and its contents; for the GOA, it would be the most important document presented to the U.S. Congress in 1980.

Asserting there were significant differences between the human rights situation in Argentina in 1977-1978 and 1979, Ambassador Aja Espil said that the US should recognize in the report the positive developments that occurred this year:

-- The IAHRC's visit to Argentina was the result of difficult steps taken by the Argentine Government.

-- The Supreme Court's favorable ruling on the Timerman case, a reflection of the Court's independence, was upheld by the Executive and resulted in Timerman's release.

-- Jaime Lokman's right of option was approved.

-- The international and local organizations of B'nai B'rith met in Argentina. Jack Spitzer, President

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RFS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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of the International Organization of B'nai B'rith in the U.S., attended the meeting

-- A new political plan setting guidelines for redemocratization would be announced next week.

Ambassador Aja Espil stated that human rights problems in Argentina should be taken in context with those in other countries. Argentina has not asked for a quid pro quo from the US for its human rights improvements, but has supported US positions in Third World fora such as the Non-Aligned Movement. The conclusion of the recent agreement on hides also demonstrated Argentina's desire for continued bilateral cooperation. Such efforts required special US recognition.

Mr. Bushnell said the US was well aware of the importance that Argentina placed on our human rights report; since there has been no report on Argentina for the past two years, it was particularly important that the report be placed in proper perspective. We hope to accomplish this in the introduction. Although serious problems with human rights remain in Argentina, it is clear that there has been an improvement in 1979. The number of disappearances has been reduced as has the number of PEN prisoners. Courts function, and the trend is one of improvement. On the political scene, we have noted no great progress, although we recognize that the recent shifts in leadership and the political positioning currently taking place could imply greater movement in this area. Because of the report's format, these developments cannot be adequately addressed. The report will both acknowledge the improvements and highlight the problems remaining. The cut-off date for new information was November; events occurring after that time would not be included.

Noting that improvements in human rights were in Argentina's own interest as well as in the interest of the United States, Mr. Bushnell said that the U.S. and Argentina also had other interests that coincided. We appreciated Argentine support for US positions internationally; at the same time we noted Argentina's support for Cuba in the UN Security Council and the recent Argentine military visits to the USSR. Managing the overall bilateral relationship is ARA's responsibility, and it is important that we work together to improve bilateral relations. The major factor affecting our relations is human rights; the trend is good, but there is a long way to go.

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Commenting on the IAHRC's report on the human rights situation in Argentina, Ambassador Aja Espil said that the OAS was delivering the report to Ambassador Quijano that day. There was an important difference between the IAHRC and the Department reports insofar as the latter should emphasize 1979 and therefore reflect a more positive point of view. *by Aja?*

Mr. Bushnell said both reports were independent documents; neither would influence the other. He noted that during a luncheon given for Larry Birnes of COHA, Mr. Birnes asserted that he had seen a copy at the OAS, but that the press release said he had received a copy of the IAHRC report on Argentina from US Government officials. Mr. Bushnell emphasized that no one in the Carter Administration had seen a copy of the report and that Mr. Birnes source, if his statements were accurate, was not in the Carter Administration.

Responding to Ambassador Aja Espil's question of whether the US human rights report would indicate the position of the US and be used by the US delegation at the UNHRC meeting scheduled early next year, Mr. Bushnell said the report would be available to our delegation, but would not necessarily indicate the US position. Ambassador Aja Espil presented an aide memoire asking that the US maintain a "constructive position" with respect to Argentina at the upcoming session.

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